



Christmas



HOW BABOUSHKA FOUND THE CHRIST CHILD

By...
JEANNETTE H. WALWORTH

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By Jeannette
H. Walworth

NIGHT was falling fast, and the snow was piled high against the outer walls of the hovel where a poor moujik (peasant) named Katoma lay dying in a little village in far-away Russia.

Katoma knew that he was going to die. It was Christmas eve, but there was no gladness in the season for him. His wife, whom he had loved very dearly, was already gone. For three consecutive years now his crops had failed. A few weeks before the wolves had devoured his last cow. If he had been entirely alone in the world he would have said to death, "Come; thou art welcome!"

But there was one other, his boy Ossip. The idea of death became terrible when he thought of leaving his boy all alone with not a copeck to bless himself with.

When I tell you that it takes 100 copecks to make a ruble and that a ruble is less than 60 cents, you will understand how dreadfully poor Katoma was.

He could not die peacefully for thinking of Ossip's future. His dim eyes turned fondly toward the pillow by his side, which the boy's thick black hair almost covered. Ossip lay motionless in sleep. The sick man put one feeble hand upon his boy's smooth forehead and silently commended him to heaven's care.

The house was very still. The hour was late. Ossip's healthy, regular breathing was the only audible sound. If only kind heaven would raise up one friend for his boy out of the millions of good people this big world swarmed with, Katoma felt that he should not mind how soon he was laid away under the frozen sods.

While his hand rested on Ossip's head and his heart was filled with these anxious thoughts the door of the hovel opened softly. The moujik turned wondering eyes in that direction, and there, coming noiselessly toward him across the beaten earthen floor, was a tall woman with soft brown eyes full of pitying tenderness.

She came close to the bed, on Ossip's side of it, and, looking down upon the sleeping child, she muttered:

"Perhaps this is the one at last."

Katoma looked at her anxiously.

"Whence came you, good mother, and what seek you?"

Across the sleeping boy she answered softly:

"I have come for Ossip. They told me in the village that thy days were numbered, and I knew that Ossip would need a friend. I will love and

name, little one, and what dost thou here alone in the bitter nighttime?"

At which the child's tears flowed afresh, and between her sobs she told the kind, soft-eyed woman how she had been traveling with a great company of men and women who were leaving their own village to seek a better land across the seas—our own blessed America. I make no doubt—and how, when they had encamped for the night, her aunt, who was the only relative she had in the world, had sent her into the woods to gather fagots to put under their soup kettle, and how she had wandered so far that she had



SHE TOOK THE CRIPPLED BOY IN HER ARMS.

not been able to find her way back to the camp, and how she feared the wolves would devour her before any one should come to look for her. Then she told Baboushka that her name was Vasalissa.

Baboushka clasped the little wanderer to her great motherly heart.

"That, indeed, the wolves shall not, my dear little Vasalissa. I cannot give thee back to thy aunt, for I know no better than thou dost where this great company of men and women may be camping for the night. But thou shalt go home with Ossip and me. Thou shalt share our fire and our porridge, and all that is mine thou shalt share with Ossip. I can keep the wolves of hunger and cold away, and if thy aunt comes to claim thee she shall find thee rosy and happy."

Then Vasalissa quickly dried her tears, and with her hand clasped in Baboushka's she trudged cheerfully forward until they came to a tiny little cottage set back from the road a short distance. In its one window a lamp was burning brightly.

The window and the lamp belonged to Baboushka's cottage. She pushed its unlocked door open, and the children entered with her into a clean, sweet, well-warmed room.

A large chair was drawn close up to the hearth. As Baboushka entered she glanced eagerly at this chair, and again she muttered under her breath:

"I had hoped he might have come while I was out."

"Good mother," Ossip asked, "why do you leave a lighted lamp in the window when you go away?"

"So that," she answered, "should any one go astray in the cold and the dark he might find his way to my poor cottage. And now let us see if the bean broth has kept warm all this time. I made it before I left home in the early morning hours so that if any wanderers found their way hither they might not leave my roof hungry."

The bean broth had kept warm. She bade Ossip throw a few more fagots under the pot and set Vasalissa on a stool in the warmest nook. Then she brought three bowls, filled them with the bean broth and put them on the table. Over them she asked a blessing.

Before her own wooden spoon had made two journeys from bowl to lip she heard a timid knock at the door. She ran quickly to answer it. A tall, pale lad stood outside. In his arms he carried a small mite of a boy, about whose shoulders was wrapped a worn and soiled woman's shawl.

The tall, pale lad looked into the fire lighted room with longing eyes. His teeth chattered with the cold as he asked: "Good mother, may we ask shelter for the night? The cold bites bitter hard, and my little brother Petrusha is out a sickly cripple."

Then Baboushka opened wide her door with an eager hand and fast beating heart. Perhaps, at last, this was the child. What she said aloud was:

"That indeed thou mayest. But why art thou abroad on such a bitter night with the little one?"

She took the crippled boy in her strong, loving arms and chided him

straight to the great chair in the chimney corner. She rapped her own best shawl about him and chafed his small, withered feet until they glowed with warmth. The tall, pale lad looked on gratefully.

"I am seeking an asylum for the little one," he said. "I have to work hard to keep him and myself from want. A rich merchant has promised me work, but he says I must not bring Petrusha. That he would take too much of my time."

"And where seek you an asylum for him?"

Baboushka looked pitifully at the small, sad face of the cripple. The tall brother answered sadly:

"Alas, that I know not yet. I was seeking the nearest town to ask counsel of the priest."

Baboushka laid a kind hand on the boy's arm.

"Put care away from thy young heart. Thou hast found an asylum for thy crippled brother. He shall travel no farther on the frozen roads. He shall be my own little Petrusha. I have a tiny trundle bed into which he will fit to a nicety. Such as I have, dear child, I make thee welcome to in the Christ Child's name."

The night was but very little older when the three children, Ossip, Vasalissa and Petrusha, fed, warmed and comforted, were sleeping the care-free sleep of innocent childhood.

Only the tall lad and Baboushka sat by the fireside, because there was no bed left for them.

"Tell me, good mother," the boy said, looking straight into her kind eyes, "why are you so good to all children? Your fame has gone abroad."

Baboushka did not answer him at once. When she did, her voice sounded as sweet and solemn as church chimes at vesper time.

"Yes, I will tell you, my son, for you are nearing your own years of responsibility, and it will be well for you to learn in good time the solemn lesson that an opportunity once lost is lost forever."

"Many years ago I was setting my house in order when three men stopped at my door with a great piece of news."

"We have seen a radiant star in the east," they said, "and we know that the Christ Child must be come. Leave thy labor. Come with us to find him and to do him honor."

"But I sent them away with words of foolish impatience. 'Seest thou not that I am setting my house in order? Go thou to where the star beckons thee, and I will follow at some more convenient time. I can see its light without thy help.'"

"So they went their way and left me to go mine. But when the time came that I found it convenient to follow the star clouds obscured the heavens, and there was no star to be seen, and so I knew not how to seek the Christ Child."

"I have been seeking him ever since, up and down in the land. Whenever, wherever I see a little child I think perhaps I have found the One I seek, and my heart yearns over him. But not yet have I found the Christ Child, whose face must shine with the radiance of the star I lost."

With tears of sorrow wetting her eyelashes Baboushka fell asleep in her chair. She had filled all of her beds with cold and friendless children.

And as she slept a tender hand seemed to dry her tears and a loving voice to whisper in her ears:

"Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these little ones ye have done it unto me. They were homeless, and ye took them in. They were hungry, and ye have fed them. They were cold, and ye have warmed them. The Christ Child is in thy own heart."

And on that glad Christmas morning Baboushka awoke with a great peace in her soul, for she knew that she had found him she had been seeking far and wide.

The Dispatch wishes the people of Lexington a Merry Christmas and a happy New Year.

LOOKING FOR SANTA CLAUS

The snow was falling on the mountains, hiding their tops in a misty veil, and the air was full of whirling flakes, which were rapidly covering the brown earth with a carpet of white and obliterating the trail up the mountain side where trudged, or, rather, stumbled, along a grotesque childish figure in a man's rough jacket, the sleeves rolled over and over to let out the small brown hands, while the edge of the coat, on a line with her heels, left a trail in the snow. A red hood covered the child's head.

Dark curls peeping out around her face, and in the fearless, wistful eyes shone a new light, for Dorothy was going to find Santa Claus. When her mother had gone to heaven a short time before, they had carried her up the mountain, and God and Santa Claus were always associated together in the child's mind. So, if God lived up there, Santa Claus could not be far away. Thus reasoned little Dorothy in the hours when her father was off working in the mine and she was left alone with her rag doll in the little brown hut which served as shelter and home.

"Santa Claus may not come here now mother has gone," the little girl said, "and it must be near Christmas, so I will find him, and perhaps he will take me in his reindeer sleigh to see mother and God."

Little Dorothy paused in her task of sweeping the one room of their home, and, putting some potatoes in the ashes to bake, that her father's supper might be ready for him, she had wrapped herself in his old coat, donned her red hood and started out to find Santa Claus.

It chanced that day that one of the mine owners was down from the city on a tour of inspection, and, having seen Dorothy on a previous trip, he had, remembering another little girl who was very happy on Christmas eve, brought down a Christmas box for Dorothy and so strolled along with her father as he started homeward, that he might give it into the hands of the little maiden herself. But when they reached the brown hut Dorothy was not there, and when repeated calls brought no answer the two men, alarmed, started in opposite directions to seek her. Mr. Golden following the almost obliterated path up the mountain side, where, a mile beyond, he found the little one almost buried in the falling snow, and as he stooped to lift her in his arms she murmured drowsily, seeing the kind face bending over her:

"Dear, good Mr. Santa Claus, I want—"

When she opened her wistful, dark eyes again, the same kind face was bending over her as she lay on her cot in the little brown house, her father holding her in his arms, while beside her was the most beautiful doll of which she had ever dreamed, and, clasping it close to her heart, little Dorothy asked with reverent joy, the dark eyes filled with overflowing:

"Dear Mr. Santa Claus, is you God too?"

CALLIE BONNEY MARBLE.



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THE TWO SOLDIERS

By
EDWIN L. SABIN

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IT was a brilliant holiday store, the windows and the shelves and the cases ablaze with alligree and thronged with dolls and dishes and engines and trains and skates and sleds, and bobbyhorses that galloped, and crows that moored, and mice that ran, and—everything, absolutely everything, that ever enters the most rapturous Christmas dream.

In the center of the large show windows, fronting upon the gay street, stood two soldiers. They were by all odds the finest soldiers in the store, much superior to the personnel composing the different troops and regiments and companies stationed here and there along the aisles. The pair were made of tin, to be sure; but they were of heroic stature, eight inches tall, richly uniformed in black and yellow, and could be wound up so that they would present arms several times in succession.

The other soldiers, poor things, were compelled to remain the whole time at a "carry" or a "right shoulder" without relief.

Naturally these two soldiers were proud and of aspirations reaching beyond their present narrow quarters.

They pined for a wider sphere. As they stood and stared with stern, fixed gaze through the plate glass into the gay street they talked together in toy language, and none, not even the most versatile linguists among the people passing and repassing, knew that they talked.

"Oh, to get away from this eternal guard mount over a lot of frippery!" sighed the one.

"With all my heart," agreed the other. "The monotony is frightful."

"I'd give half my soldier to receive orders to report to some little boy," continued the first, "Oh, for a change!"

"But the majority of little boys are so rough and careless," responded the second. "I understand they scratch you and bend you and otherwise maltreat you without cause, and soon you're done for. I prefer duty of a more quiet, instructive nature, where I may teach by means of my deportment rather than by violent action."

"Well, I should enjoy a hard drill and a tussle, I believe," asserted the first.

"Our organism is too fine for such active service, my lad," indulgently corrected the second. "What—scratches and dents? No, no. Give me a post of more elegance, where my uniform will be treated as it deserves."

Christmas day had been over and gone a month when after their separation the two soldiers again encountered one another, but this time in a great heap of rubbish at the city dump, where the dump man had unwittingly thrown them out.

"Hurrah! Hello, old chap!" exclaimed the first soldier delightedly.

"Hello!" returned the second, with rather more reserve. "Goodness! Been through the Seven Years' war?"

Well might he put this query. The other soldier was a perfect wreck. He had lost an arm and a foot, his head was sharply inclined forward upon his chest, he had only one eye, his body was twisted askew, his gun was broken, his cap was missing, his features were battered and distorted, and as for his uniform of black and yellow—there was hardly a spot of paint on him!

"I—I've been having my tussle," announced the first, with a cracked laugh. "But you—way, you evidently found just what you were looking for!"

"Yes," explained the second, "I fell into an excellent post. It was the

hands of a little boy, sure enough, but he wasn't allowed to hurt me. See, I haven't a mark on me." And he exhibited himself proudly.

True, he was still in dress parade condition.

"Thunder and Mars!" chuckled the first. "And look at me! Do you mean to say that you never were stepped on?"

"Oh, no," replied the second. "I didn't lie around on the floor. I was put away just as soon as he was done playing with me. His mother had made him a very orderly little boy."

"So you never stayed out all night in the hall or in the middle of the sitting room?"

"Never," said the spick and span soldier.

"And did he shoot at you with his rubber gun ever?"

"Never," said the spick and span soldier.

"And he didn't bite you to see how soft you were?"

"Never," said the spick and span soldier.

"Or drag you about among the chairs with a string?"

"Never," said the spick and span soldier.

"Or sick the terrier on you?"

"Never."

"Or take you to bed with him and roll on you?"

"Never. I was always placed on the shelf in the closet."

"Or kick you or whack you or throw you?"

"Never. Watch—I can present arms as well as ever."

"Or kiss you and hug you with all his might and cry for you when he was sick through eating too much candy?"

"Never. He used to forget me entirely for days and days. Did your boy really do all that to you?"

"Yes, all that and more," answered the battered soldier softly.

"And did he kiss you, you say?"

asked the spick and span soldier a bit wistfully.

"Yes; he kicked me and he kissed me," laughed the first.

"And did you enjoy it?" pursued the second curiously.

"I had the time of my life," declared the other. "How did you find things—up to your expectations?"

The spick and span soldier hesitated; then he replied:

"Possibly. I can't complain. But—somehow I grew dreadfully ennuied. I almost longed at times for more excitement, more energy. We got tired of one another. After a day or so we exhausted all our programme of proper exercises, and he was so cautious of wearing me out that I was laid aside, and—finally, here I am. I don't suppose he even knows that I'm gone."

"Dear me," mused the other. "I'm glad my little boy was not like yours. Of course there are the knocks; but,

hands of a little boy, sure enough, but he wasn't allowed to hurt me. See, I haven't a mark on me." And he exhibited himself proudly.

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"Dear me," mused the other. "I'm glad my little boy was not like yours. Of course there are the knocks; but,

oh, our companionship was sweet! I bet he's crying for me at this instant, poor chum! Still, it is as well that I am carted to the dump. I am old and disfigured and a back number, and I wanted to go before he would cease to miss me."

The spick and span soldier was silent.

"Hi, y!" soliloquized the veteran, with a sigh and with a chuckle, stiffly rolling over on his back. "I'm past repairs, but it was sweet—aye, it was worth it! I have had—the time-of—my—life."

And with his one eye he gazed through a clank in the debris up at the stars.

THE VETERANS MEET.

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"I HAVE COME FOR OSSIP."

care for him as though he were my very own. I am called Baboushka, and I keep my promises."

Then Katoma, the moujik, died happy, for he knew that Baboushka was a friend to all little children, and when she gathered Ossip close into her motherly arms when the end came the child ceased weeping for his dead father.

When Baboushka and Ossip were well on their way to the old woman's home, in the next village, they heard a pitiful sound of weeping somewhere on the tree shadowed side of the road.

The old woman stopped at the sound. "We will go and see who is in trouble, Ossip. Our eyes and ears should always be kept well opened so that no sign of distress may escape us."

Guided by the sound, they came to a stone where, wailing and shivering in the darkness of the winter night, they found a little girl scarcely as large as Ossip, who was not at all well grown for his eight years.

Baboushka knelt down by the child and, gathering her cold little feet into a warm clasp, muttered:

"Perhaps this is the child."

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